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Park & Recreation Director Set to Retire Sheila Canzian Honored for 52-year Career in Public Service

San Mateo, CA – After an influential and award-winning career expanding recreational opportunities in the City of San Mateo, long-time Parks and Recreation Director Sheila Canzian will retire in June 2022.



Canzian is one of the City’s longest-serving employees who has been instrumental in managing San Mateo’s well-known recreational programs, facilities and amenities. Some of her proudest accomplishments include creating the City’s Shoreline Parks along the bayfront, co-founding the nonprofit Police Activities League, rebuilding the Poplar Creek Golf Course, establishing the Senior Center, updating the Central Park Master Plan, bringing a seasonal ice rink to Central Park, and creating a Learning Education Assistance Program to support school children during the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I have been blessed to work with a great team of staff and amazing managers over the years,” Canzian said. “I loved working in San Mateo, it is my community and it is heartwarming to walk through the parks and see so many children and families enjoying what our department provides. Parks bring the community together, whether it be at special events such as the Summer Concerts in the Park series and Winter Wonderland, or for family gatherings such as celebrating birthdays and reunions.”

A San Mateo native, she is a second-generation City employee whose father served as a firefighter during World War II. She started with the City while in college as a volunteer in Central Park in 1969 and was hired in 1970 as a summer playground leader. She rose the ranks over the years holding positions as senior supervisor, section manager and community services manager, before being appointed as the Parks and Recreation Director in 1990.

Canzian is passionate about advancing the Parks and Recreation profession, and has earned a number of coveted statewide and national recognitions. In 2021, she was voted into the American Academy for Parks and Recreation Administration, a highly-regarded national organization of distinguished professionals. She’s previously received the Hall of Fame/Fellowship Award from the California Parks and Recreation Society, a statewide organization through which she’s served in numerous leadership positions including as president and secretary-treasurer, and recently received the Distinguished Professional Award from CPRS District IV.

“Sheila has made immeasurable contributions to the San Mateo community and is an icon in her profession,” said City Manager Drew Corbett. “Our parks and recreation amenities are beloved by so many people and significantly enhance the quality of life here in San Mateo. Our organization has benefited tremendously thanks to her steadfast leadership, wealth of experience and remarkable number of years she spent serving the public.”

Canzian is set to retire June 9, 2022. A new Parks and Recreation Director will be named shortly to oversee the department responsible for managing San Mateo's 35 parks, six recreation/community centers, the Marina Lagoon, the 18-hole Poplar Creek Golf Course, nearly 23,600 city trees, and numerous programs and events.

Canzian has served on the boards of the San Mateo Police Activities League and San Mateo Parks Foundation, and plans to stay active in her role on community boards including for the nonprofit Peninsula Family Service, Mills Peninsula Hospital Foundation, and the St. Johns Cemetery Board. She looks forward to continuing her volunteer work, traveling, gardening and enjoying the many parks in her hometown of San Mateo. She holds an undergraduate degree in History, and a Masters in Public Administration. While in college, she originally planned to go into teaching history, but says she's grateful she instead landed in a rewarding career in parks and recreation.

"I was born and raised in San Mateo and spent summers at our local school playground. Growing up I always had so much fun visiting our parks and getting to work in them these last 50 years has been the best career I could have ever wished for," Canzian said.

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